DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 656 CS 011 005

AUTHOR Johns, Jerry L.; VanLeirsburg, Peggy
TITLE Portfolio Assessment: A Survey among Professionals. Literacy Research Report No. 1.
INSTITUTION Northern Illinois Univ., DeKalb. Curriculum and Instruction Reading Clinic.
PUB DATE Aug 90
NOTE 11p.; For a related document, see ED 335 668.
AVAILABLE FROM Northern Illinois University, The Reading Clinic, 119 Graham, DeKalb, IL 60115 ($3.50, postage included).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Elementary Secondary Education; *Portfolios (Background Materials); Questionnaires; *Student Evaluation; Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Alternative Assessment; Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

A study examined the views of education professionals toward four aspects of portfolio assessment: general knowledge, theoretical bases, contents, and practical problems. Subjects, 128 elementary teachers, secondary teachers, special reading teachers, and administrators attending a June 1990 reading workshop, completed a survey. Results indicated that: (1) there was little general familiarity with the concept of portfolio assessment; (2) most agreed with its theoretical bases (authentic, continuous, multidimensional, and collaborative); (3) paper and pencil tasks were chosen most often for inclusion; and (4) the subjects expressed numerous concerns over implementing portfolio assessment. Findings suggest that steps need to be taken to inform educators that portfolio assessment affords the classroom teacher information for decision-making that is valid and specific. (Two figures of data are included.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED348656

Northern Illinois University

Literacy Research Report No. 1

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: A SURVEY AMONG PROFESSIONALS

Jerry L. Johns
Peggy Vanleirsburg

Literacy Research and Reports

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Curriculum and Instruction
Reading Clinic—119 Graham
DeKalb, Illinois 60115

PS 021005

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jerry Johns

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Literacy Research Report No. 1

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: A SURVEY AMONG PROFESSIONALS

Jerry L. Johns
Northern Illinois University

Peggy VanLeirsburg
Elgin Public Schools

August 1990

Northern Illinois University
Reading Clinic--119 Graham
DeKalb, Illinois 60115
815-753-1416

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT:
A SURVEY AMONG PROFESSIONALS

A portfolio approach to classroom literacy assessment has been described in recent literature (Jongsma, 1989; Mathews, 1990; Valencia, 1990). Disenchantment with traditional modes of assessment and changes in reading curriculum have probably contributed to this approach for evaluation. Portfolios offer an alternate means of documenting and evaluating growth in literacy. Some classroom teachers have begun to institute portfolio assessment as a valid means to measure literacy growth in the classroom. In addition, some school systems (Mathews, 1990) are beginning to develop the portfolio as an assessment tool to be used within their districts. How widespread is knowledge and use of portfolio assessment? Do professionals value this type of individual student measurement?

Rationale for Portfolios

Valencia (1990) cites four guiding principles to serve as the rationale for the portfolio assessment of literacy development.

1. Sound assessment is based on authenticity.
2. Assessment must be a continuous, on-going process that chronicles literacy development.
3. Assessment must be a multifaceted, multidimensional process to accurately reflect the complexity of the literacy process.
4. Assessment must provide opportunities for collaborative reflection by both teachers and students.

Such naturalistic evaluation focuses on real literacy activities occurring over a period of time. Evaluation is linked to instruction and values the interaction of teachers and students in the development and maintenance of the portfolio.

Professionals can already read about the theoretical basis, suggested contents, and even potential problems related to portfolio assessment. But how do

classroom teachers, specialists, and principals perceive this evaluative process? It is our purpose to offer the views of educational professionals toward four aspects of portfolio assessment: general knowledge, theoretical bases, contents, and practical problems.

Professionals Respond to Survey

We administered a written survey in June, 1990 to 128 educators attending a reading workshop. Approximately two-thirds of the educators were elementary teachers; the remaining one-third were secondary teachers, reading specialists, or administrators. Half of the total group had six or more years teaching experience. More than half of our sample had attained a masters degree or beyond. In addition, more than half had taken twelve or more hours of coursework specifically in reading. Workshop participants came from many different school systems in the northern part of Illinois.

Findings

Our findings are presented in four areas: knowledge, content, theoretical bases, and practical problems of portfolios.

Knowledge of Portfolios

Educators were asked to rate their familiarity of the "portfolio" concept using a five-point scale which ranged from "extremely familiar" to "I'm not." Nearly 71% rated their knowledge "very little" to "none." No one felt that he or she was extremely knowledgeable. Only 8% viewed their familiarity with portfolio assessment as "quite a bit."

Portfolio Contents

Our sample was then requested to rate a list of possible contents of a portfolio. They were requested to again use a five-point scale ranging from "I'd definitely include it" to "I definitely wouldn't include it" to rate each possible source for portfolios. Items listed for possible inclusion in a literacy portfolio and our survey results are shown in Figure 1. Total percentages for each item may vary between 99 and 101 due to rounding.

Figure 1

Opinions of Professionals Toward Including

Selected Items in a Portfolio

Percent						Portfolio Items
DI	PI	U	PW	DW	N	
13	27	41	13	2	4	audio tapes
13	30	34	15	4	5	videotapes of classroom reading activities
8	27	36	17	8	4	photographs of reading activities
46	33	11	5	1	5	a listing of materials read
54	25	16	1	0	4	writing samples related to reading
44	30	20	2	0	5	a checklist of relevant reading behaviors
38	40	14	2	1	5	student self-evaluations
45	36	13	2	0	5	a thoughtful selection of student work on important reading skills or strategies
41	36	16	2	1	5	teacher evaluations and insights
34	29	28	2	2	5	collaboratively (student and teacher) produced progress notes
32	27	27	8	1	5	classroom notes

DI = I'd definitely include
PI = I'd probably include
U = I'm uncertain
PW = I probably wouldn't include
DW = I definitely wouldn't include
N = No response

Only 35 to 43% of the educators surveyed would definitely or probably include audio tapes, video tapes, or photographs in a portfolio. Classroom tests would definitely or probably be included by 59% of the sample. The remaining content items, with the exception of collaboratively produced progress notes, would be included by at least 74% of the sample. The item most selected (81%) to include in a portfolio of literacy assessment was "a thoughtful selection of student work on important reading skills or strategies."

Theoretical Basis for Portfolio Assessment

Our survey requested that the educators respond to Valencia's (1990) four statements of rationale for portfolios on a five-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to strongly disagree." Approximately 60% agreed that authenticity should anchor reading assessment. Nearly 80% also agreed that assessment should be on-going, multidimensional, and collaborative. Importantly, nearly 90% of the professionals agreed that assessment should be a continuous, ongoing process. Fewer than 2% of the respondents disagreed with any of these underlying principles of portfolio assessment.

Practical Problems with Portfolios

The fourth area we surveyed was that of possible practical problems inherent in portfolio assessment. Our questionnaire asked educators to rate a list of possible problems on a five-point scale ranging from "a very serious concern" to "no concern." The potential problems that may confront users of portfolios are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Opinions of Professionals Toward Possible

Practical Problems with Portfolios

Percent						Possible Practical Problems
VS	SC	S	VL	NC	N	
17	31	37	2	3	9	planning portfolios
17	28	39	5	2	3	organizing portfolios
20	31	37	2	1	10	managing the contents of portfolios
13	30	42	3	2	10	developing checklists for the portfolios
5	14	40	23	7	11	where to keep portfolios
3	29	38	16	3	11	providing access to students
12	26	30	13	9	11	talking to students about contents
9	32	38	9	2	11	preparing notes; completing checklists
18	19	28	15	9	12	all teachers in my school using a portfolio
20	13	30	15	12	11	all my school system embracing the use of portfolios
9	19	31	21	9	11	using portfolios in parent-teacher conferences
17	20	32	12	8	11	using portfolios as sole means of evaluating student progress
6	22	27	21	13	11	using portfolios as one means of evaluating student progress
23	22	27	11	6	11	having portfolios replace standardized reading tests or achievement tests

VS = Very serious concern
SC = Serious concern
S = Some concern
VL = Very little concern
NC = No concern
N = No response

Importantly, about 11% of the educators surveyed did not respond to this list of potential problems with the use of portfolios. Of those educators who responded, over 50% expressed very serious, serious, or some concern with all of the items except using portfolios in parent-teacher conferences. Nearly half of the educators

had very serious or serious concerns with planning, organizing, and managing issues related to portfolio assessment. At least 72% expressed at least some concern with the issue of "having portfolios replace standardized reading tests or achievement tests."

Discussion and Conclusions

In our sample of 128 elementary teachers, secondary teachers, special reading teachers, and administrators, there is little general familiarity with the concept of portfolio assessment. Most of the sample, nevertheless, agreed with these theoretical bases of assessment: authentic, continuous, multidimensional, and collaborative. These four guiding principles serve as the rationale for literacy assessment (Valencia, 1990). It appears that although most educators agree with its theoretical bases as an assessment device, portfolios are not widely understood at the time (June, 1990) of this survey.

Perhaps this lack of familiarity explains, to some extent, why approximately 11% of those surveyed did not respond to practical concerns related to portfolio assessment. Those educators who did respond, however, expressed numerous concerns with such an assessment mode. They want to know how to plan, organize, and manage portfolios. They indicate concern about whether or not portfolio assessment will replace or add to already existing standardized testing programs.

The contents of a literacy portfolio are also at issue. Most of those surveyed would not include audio tapes, video tapes, or photographs. We infer that most teachers view these items as time-consuming, costly, and bulky. Paper and pencil tasks, as well as dialogue with students, were chosen more often for inclusion.

Portfolio assessment requires teachers and school systems to make decisions about which data are important to include. These choices can only be made when the objectives for learning are clearly defined. Teaching to these objectives is interwoven with continuous, on-going assessment. What product will measure which process? Once this question is answered, the contents of a portfolio can then be designed to include those sources that measure important objectives.

Practical concerns, not conceptual issues, may limit portfolios from achieving their full potential. Assuming that portfolios gain a level of general acceptance, the heavy demand on a teacher's time may prohibit their widespread use. Some teachers may willingly devote the necessary time and energy to build and maintain portfolios, but it is not realistic to expect that all staff members of a school or district will embrace the process. Veteran teachers may reject the "pain" of change as not worthy of the "gain."

There are things that all students can do. These things are documentable. A review of anecdotes, checklists, and work samples will help demonstrate a pattern of student progress. A literacy portfolio, with multiple types of data, exhibits a broader base of information about the abilities of a specific learner than either a letter grade or a test score alone. Portfolio documentation offers the teacher information to extend and "encourage significant growth far beyond the measurements reflected in formal, standardized testing" (Goodman, Goodman, & Hood, 1989, p. 260).

We feel that steps need to be taken to inform educators--teachers and administrators--that portfolio assessment affords the classroom teacher information for decision-making that is valid and specific. Initiating and monitoring portfolios present genuine challenges that must be met and answered in order for portfolios to have a chance to succeed as an innovative form of literacy assessment.

References

Goodman, K.S., Goodman, Y.M., & Hood, W.J. (1989). The whole language evaluation book. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Jongsma, K. (1989). Portfolio assessment. The Reading Teacher, 43, 264-265.

Mathews, J.K. (1990). From computer management to portfolio assessment. The Reading Teacher, 43, 420-421.

Valencia, S. (1990). A portfolio approach to classroom reading assessment. The Reading Teacher, 43, 338-340.